

## IMPERIAL INSURANCE OFFICE.

In our last number we gave a view of the building now being created for this company. For this structure there was a select competition in December, 1846, when the whole of the designs were submitted to Mr. John Shaw, architect (one of the official referees), for his opinion; upon which the directors of the company awarded the first premium, of 100 guineas, to Mr. Gibson, under whose direction the work is being executed by Messrs. Piper, builders.

The building is now roofed in (having been commenced in June last year), and occupies a piece of ground at the junction of Thread-needle and Old Broad streets, near the Royal Exchange, and adjoining the Hall of Commerce; the two elevations have 90 feet and 60 feet frontage respectively: our view shews the elevation of the long frontage.

The ground-floor is divided into an entrance vestibule, principal and private stairs, town office, country office, accountant's office, with separate rooms for the heads or principals of each department, and strong rooms adjoining.

The one-pair floor contains a life office, actuary, physician, board room, managing director, with waiting rooms and safes.

The two-pair floor has committee and waiting rooms, with a clerk's residence.

The basement is divided into strong rooms, clerks' rooms, residence for porter, &c. &c.

The two elevations are faced with Portland stone; the keystones of the ground-floor windows have carved masks representing fire, water, strength, &c. &c. The dado of the one-pair windows has a carved epher (i. l. crossed), through an imperial coronet.

The insignia of the company occupy a panel ranging with the upper windows, 8 feet 6 inches by 9 feet, and represent, in alto relievo, the shields of Great Britain and Ireland, with their supporters, and two figures of Plenty bearing the imperial crown.

Leadbeater of Aldersgate-street has constructed some efficient fire-proof doors, with ventilating grates, for the strong rooms of the building.

## THE LABOUR QUESTION IN FRANCE.

So far from the grand scheme for the organization of labour on communistic or on national principles in France having made one single step towards a realization, the industry of the whole country is in a state of complete anarchy, and the doings, or rather the idlings without doings, at the Luxembourg are now acknowledged on all hands to have not only been one of the principal means of plunging the whole body politic itself into a state bordering on anarchy, but to hang at this moment like a millstone round the necks of the Government, who are swimming for their lives in this sea of troubles. No wonder, therefore, that the Minister of Public Works has at length felt himself compelled to acknowledge "that the system of *ateliers nationaux*, instituted at the moment of the revolution, when it was necessary to do something for the numerous workmen out of employment, was no longer calculated to give satisfaction to any party;" or that he has accordingly, in his desperation, "proposed that all the men so employed should be set down to useful works. He would take the youngest, and propose that they should be enrolled in the army; others might be sent home to their departments, on being allowed a sum of money; the greater number he would propose to employ in reclaiming waste lands and digging canals; the rest he would have employed on railways." The subject has been referred to a Committee. Thus, over and above the hundreds of thousands called away as it were by the late revolution from a normal state of industry to be "organized" into the very different form of "mobilized National Guards," we find additional multitudes yet to be disposed of, who were thrown out of work at the same time and by the same cause,—for really to throw them into national workshops was little else than to throw them out of any little work that many of them might have previously been obliged to seek for themselves to obtain a living.—M. Leon Faucher while developing his motion in the National Assembly respecting the national workshops, stated that there were "in Paris alone

120,000 individuals employed in the workshops, paid at the rate of 2*fr.* per day, entailing on the State an expense of 6,000,000*fr.* per month, or 72,000,000*fr.* per annum. The operatives themselves, he said, condemned a system which had not even the merit of disguising charity. It was, in reality, a premium offered to laziness and inaction. One-half of the population could not thus continue to live at the expense of the other. The Government, however, was bound to afford work to the labouring classes. In demanding a credit of 10,000,000*fr.* for that object, he desired to convert an unproductive into a productive expense, and to rid the country of the leprosy of pauperism, and the capital of these dangerous *lazzaroni*." The Assembly referred the proposition to the Committees of Labour and Finance.—The *Reforme* states that there are at present in Paris 175,000 male and female\* operatives in want of employment; 110,500 who are employed four days in the week; and 52,000 who are never employed: a total of 375,000 operatives in Paris and the suburbs, whose distress is indescribable.

Much need there is, therefore, to do something on the reconvalescent principle, if we may so call it, since the national provision-all system has failed. And that it has failed, and how it has failed, may be gathered from a single instance of recent occurrence, which tended completely to open the eyes of the workmen themselves to the natural and inevitable consequences of such a system. The *atelier social* to which we allude, and which has ended in the most miserable failure, although tried under the most favourable circumstances, was thus formed:—"The debtors' gaol of Clichy having been evacuated, a social organization of tailors was there established, and at once set to work on the clothing for the Mobile Guard, on Louis Blanc's plan, namely—fixed wages for all alike, whether strong or weak, active or slow, industrious or idle, quick or stupid; and the consequence has been that, after having kept the poor mobiles perishing in their blouses and bare feet so long that they threatened to storm the garrison, and take their clothing, made or unmade, the work was at length finished, and the expected dividend, after two francs a day wages, amounted to some few pence a man! One such instance may be deemed more than sufficient, but we may add yet another, on the authority of the *Economist*, which states that the public works at Belle Ville, executed by the workmen of the Provisional Government, cost the public purse 50,000*fr.* When measured it was found that the cost, if executed by an ordinary contractor, would have been rather less than 2,000*fr.*! And yet it was out of the profits of such concerns as these, and others founded on the basis of these, that Louis Blanc was to "increase the annual receipts of the national treasury by several hundred millions *fr.*" Long previous to the latter doings, however, Louis Blanc had lost any influence or favour among the more sober and common-sense order of the workmen. He was returned to the Assembly with scarce one thorough supporter.—The new Committee on Labour have met. They have decided to form sub-committees, and call before them those "likely to throw light on the question of the organization of labour" (not, of course, on communistic nor on 'national atelier' principles).—The *Moniteur* announces that M. Flocon, Minister of Agriculture and Commerce, is making arrangements for the cultivation of the waste lands and the general amelioration of agriculture, and that the rights of all agricultural labourers and workmen in manufactories, &c., will be "democratically appreciated and satisfied."—It is a well-known fact that while the towns are gorged with idle workmen, and every business over-stocked, the rich land in the neighbourhood is famishing for want of hands. A knowledge of this fact has suggested another commission of inquiry into the state of labour, all over the country, of a most searching and minute description, for which a decree has already gone forth.—The *Moniteur* publishes the returns of the trade of France during the first four months of 1848, showing a terrific diminution in the amount of the import duties, which only produced

26,786,969*fr.* The proceeds during the corresponding period of 1846 had been 48,946,187*fr.*, and in 1847 43,720,267*fr.* The duties collected during the month of April had fallen to 3,764,390*fr.* In April, 1846, they had amounted to 12,725,150*fr.* and in 1847, to 10,750,672*fr.*

—The provinces are in a lamentable state. At Lyons silks worth 24 francs a yard have been sold for 8 francs, and the industrial community there are in complete anarchy, the workmen having the supremacy, with an organized system of terrorism, and citizens were seized, held prisoners, and threatened to be shot. The government lately sent 500,000 francs to the 'national workshops' there, in the vain attempt to pacify, and authorised the city to borrow 1,500,000 more on the "extraordinary imposition of 45 centimes on landed property." These funds were to be laid out on the Lyons and Geneva Railway.—Seven hundred men employed at the breakwater of Cherbourg have been dismissed for want of funds to pay them.

—At Marseilles, where the idle workmen have been receiving 2 francs a day for doing literally nothing, they actually threatened to murder one of their companions, who was desirous of working conscientiously. The town treasury being empty, a resolution was come to to put the men on piece-work [a scheme just decided on at Paris]. Grumblingly they demanded 10 francs per 3 feet cubic for work worth about a franc and a half.—The national workshops at Aix have been closed, "having been an enormous charge to the town, and bringing in nothing."—At Rouen the national funds depended on for the purpose of keeping the working classes 'employed,' are exhausted, and the charitable institutions are to be closed.—In short, throughout the whole country vast masses are unemployed, who must be paid by the State or driven to outrage, and the means of providing for them are becoming daily more difficult to procure. The condition of the manufacturers is one of actual or approaching insolvency. Such a state of things, as remarked by a contemporary, must have a speedy end. The whole fabric, not only of French, but of continental industry, is shaken to its base, and must come to the ground, when to be built up again who can say, and at what cost? Truly our neighbours are paying dearly for their various whistles; and affording a warning which others will do well to contemplate attentively.

## SCENERY AT THE ITALIAN OPERA HOUSE, COVENT GARDEN.

OUR contemporaries, one and all, have borne testimony to the beauty of the scene painted for the last act of Donizetti's Opera *La Favorita*, as produced last week at the Royal Italian Opera House, Covent Garden. The daily papers have pronounced it perfection, and the *Athenaeum* says,—"We have seen no English stage effect like that of the cloister scene in the fourth act: a piece of gorgeous and impressive reality in which Mr. Grieve has equalled the best interiors of the *Académie*. (In open-air landscapes, &c. it is needless to say that our scene-painters are beyond all rivalry.)"

It is truly a beautiful and effective scene, built up on the stage as well as painted, but all having pointed out its excellence, we should not have considered allusion to it necessary, had it not exhibited an error which, as it may be usefully spoken of, affords us a legitimate opportunity to record, notwithstanding, our admiration of the artistic skill displayed. The stage, if we understand the intention rightly, represents the ruined nave of the church of a monastery, unroofed, excepting a portion immediately adjoining the proscenium. On the left hand side a series of pointed arches, on columns, are glazed, and seem to form part of a chapel, which is lighted up, and on the right a series of similar arches, on coupled columns, admit the moonlight, and shew other ruined portions of the monastery. At the back, the chancel arch with a lengthened vista, lost in gloom beyond, and the towers seen on either side, through the roofless building forming the foreground, complete the picture,—a picture which, with the incidents of the scene, and the wonderful singing of Grial and Mario, excites the strongest emotions, and fully justifies the praises which have been bestowed upon it.

\* It is suspected that there are females among the slight and youthful-looking warriors of the Garde Mobile. The idea is at least suggestive of various rather grave reflections.